

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 FRB-03
INR-07 NSAE-00 USIA-06 TRSE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03
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USSOUTHCOM
AMCONSUL CALI
AMCONSUL BARRANQUILLA
AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

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E.O. 11652UN/A
TAGS: PINT, PINS, ECON, SOPN, SNAR
SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE ON ALLEGATIONS OF MALFEASANCE INVOLV-
ING PRESIDENT LOPEZ' SONS CONTINUED,
HARDENING DIVISIONS WITHIN AND BETWEEN COLOMBIA'S MAJOR POLITICAL
PARTIES IN THEIR SUPPORT OF THE PRESIDENT. CRITICISM OF THE
ADMINISTRATION'S ECONOMIC POLICIES INCREASED, AS DID ACTS OF
VIOLENCE BY EXTREMIST GROUPS. PRESIDENT LOPEZ POINTED OUT THE
THREAT WHICH ILLICIT DRUG TRAFFICKING POSES TO COLOMBIA
WHILE PRESIDENT CARTER'S OAS SPEECH RECEIVED AMPLE LOCAL
COVERAGE.

2. POLITICS REVIVE. HEATED DEBATES OVER ALLEGATIONS OF
IRREGULARITIES INVOLVING PRESIDENT LOPEZ' SONS AND SHARPENED
DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY MARKED A FULL RETURN
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TO POLITICAL ACTIVITY FOLLOWING THE EASTER WEEK VACATION.
SENATE LIBERAL SPOKESMEN CONDUCTED A LENGTHY, PUGNACIOUS
DEFENSE OF GOVERNMENT ACTIONS AFFECTING THE RANCH "LA
LIBERTAD," PARTLY OWNED BY FELIPE LOPEZ, AND PROMISED TO ATTACK
THE MORAL CREDENTIALS OF CRITICS, LOCATED MAINLY IN THE
OSPINA-PASTRANAN WING OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY. THAT FACTION
MAINTAINED AND FORMALIZED ITS CRITICAL POSITION ON A VARIETY

OF ISSUES VIS-A-VIS THE LOPEZ GOVERNMENT. AT THE SAME TIME, THE DIVISION WITHIN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY HARDENED AS ALL SIX CONSERVATIVE MINISTERS FORMALLY IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES WITH THE ALVARO GOMEZ CONSERVATIVE FACTION WHICH, TOGETHER WITH THE MINISTERS, REAFFIRMED ITS FULL SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT. THESE DEBATES AND MANEUVERS FORM PART OF PRE-ELECTORAL ACTIVITY WHICH WILL CONTINUE AND PROBABLY HEIGHTEN AS THE 1978 ELECTIONS DRAW CLOSER. ATTACKS ON THE GOVERNMENT BY THE OSPINA-PASTRANA CONSERVATIVES, BUSILY STAKING OUT THEIR CAMPAIGN POSITIONS, HAVE HAD THE EFFECT OF CONSOLIDATING SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT.

3. PRIVATE SECTOR CRITICIZES ADMINISTRATION'S ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT. THE LATEST ANTI-INFLATIONARY MEASURES ADOPTED BY THE GOC (RESTRICTIONS ON SOME EXPORTS, LOWERING OF SOME DUTIES, AND THREAT OF MORE PRICE CONTROLS) DREW FIRE FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR THIS WEEK. THE PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MANUFACTURERS (ANDI) CRITICIZED THE MINISTER OF FINANCE FOR BEING REMOTE, BAD TEMPERED, AND ERRATIC; AND FOR FOCUSING TOO MUCH ON THE SHORT TERM AND HAVING NO COHERENT LONG TERM POLICY. THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF BUSINESSMEN (FENALCO) MADE SIMILAR CRITICISMS WARNING AGAINST PRICE FIXING, AND CALLING FOR A SET OF POLICIES THAT WOULD REDUCE THE FOCUS ON INFLATION AND INCREASE STIMULUS TO GROWTH. CRITICISM OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S ECONOMIC POLICIES AND MANAGEMENT HAS BEEN MORE OR LESS CONSTANT SINCE LOPEZ TOOK OFFICE, BUT THE NATURE OF THE CONCERN IS CHANGING. WHILE FORMER FINANCE MINISTER RODRIGO BOTERO WAS INTENSELY DISLIKED BY MOST BUSINESSMEN, IT WAS GENERALLY RECOGNIZED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THAT HE WAS CARRYING OUT A COHERENT POLICY. SOME OBSERVERS ARE BECOMING CONCERNED THAT THE PRESENT ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT IS NOT PAYING ENOUGH ATTENTION TO ECONOMIC FACTORS OTHER THAN INFLATION AND THUS LACKS COHERENCE AND LONG TERM DIRECTION. MOST CRITICS, HOWEVER, WILL ADMIT THAT THE PRESENT SITUATION IS EXTRAORDINARILY DIFFICULT TO MANAGE.

4. FORMATION OF RIGHT WING EXTREMIST GROUP REPORTED. AN EXTREME RIGHT WING GROUP CALLING ITSELF THE "FALANGE CONSERVADORA" (CONSERVATIVE FALANGE) HAS CLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE RECENT BOMBING IN PPOPAYAN OF A MOBILE UNIT BELONGING TO THE GOVERNMENT'S RADIO AND TELEVISION INSTITUTE (INRAVISION). THE EXPLOSION, WHICH DESTROYED VALUABLE TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT BUT CAUSED NO INJURIES, WAS REPORTEDLY IN PROTEST OF THE GOC'S DECISION TO CONTINUE TELEVISIONING A CONTROVERSIAL SERIAL BASED ON A NOVEL BY THE LEFTIST WRITER GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ. A SUPPOSED SPOKESMAN FOR THE NEW GROUP SAID THAT IT WILL CARRY OUT OTHER ACTIONS IN ORDER TO "PRESERVE THE COUNTRY'S MORAL VALUES." THE EMBASSY, SO FAR, HAS BEEN UNABLE TO

CONFIRM THE ACTUAL EXISTENCE OF SUCH A GROUP.

5. GUERRILLA ACTIVITIES CONTINUE. THE PRO-SOVIET REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA (FARC) WAS BELIEVED RESPONSIBLE FOR TWO GUERRILLA ATTACKS THIS WEEK. IN THE FIRST ATTACK, WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN A FARC EXECUTION SQUAD OF FIVE MEN MURDERED A POLICE INSPECTOR AND WOUNDED A CIVILIAN IN CAPARRAPI, CUNDINAMARCA. A SECOND, LARGER ASSAULT WAS MADE ON THE TOWN OF SAN ANDRES, HUILA BY SOME 50 TO 100 WELL-ARMED GUERRILLAS, ALSO PRESUMABLY FARC MEMBERS. LOCAL POLICE WITHSTOOD THE ATTACK FOR OVER AN HOUR UNTIL THE ARRIVAL OF POLICE AND ARMY REINFORCEMENTS. TWO CIVILIANS AND ONE POLICEMAN WERE REPORTEDLY WOUNDED IN THAT ENCOUNTER. PRESS REPORTS QUOTED THE MAYOR OF SAN ANDRES AS NOTING THAT "THE GUERRILLAS TOOK FOOD AND SUPPLIES WHICH WERE ALMOST VOLUNTARILY GIVEN BY THE RESIDENTS."

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6. LOPEZ CITES DANGERS TO COLOMBIA OF DRUG TRAFFICKING. IN AN INTERVIEW IN EL TIEMPO APRIL 10 PRESIDENT LOPEZ STATED THAT DRUG TRAFFICKING CONTRIBUTES TO INFLATION, IS THREATENING THE FISHING INDUSTRY, AFFECTS COLOMBIA'S RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. AND IN SOME AREAS DETERMINES COLOMBIAN POLITICS. HE CONCLUDED, "...EITHER WE EXTERMINATE IT (DRUGS) OR IT WILL EXTERMINATE US." THIS STATEMENT IS ONE OF THE GRIMMEST BUT MOST REALISTIC ON THE SUBJECT THAT THE PRESIDENT IS KNOWN TO HAVE MADE. UNFORTUNATELY, HE FAILED TO INDICATE ANY NEW MEASURES TO MORE EFFECTIVELY COMBAT DRUG TRAFFICKING (SEE BOGOTA 3278).

7. LOCAL MEDIA TREATMENT OF PRESIDENT'S OAS SPEECH. PRESIDENT CARTER'S APRIL 14 SPEECH BEFORE THE OAS WAS BROADCAST LIVE HERE VIA SATELLITE. IT WAS ALSO CARRIED AS A BRIEF NEWS ITEM AND WITHOUT EDITORIAL COMMENT IN THE COUNTRY'S LEADING DAILY NEWSPAPERS, AND ON TELEVISION AND RADIO NEWS PROGRAMS. IT IS TOO SOON, HOWEVER, TO EXPECT ANY SIGNIFICANT OFFICIAL OR PUBLIC REACTION TO THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH.
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